

Highlands Historical Society

Winter 2008

To preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands

Highlands, N. C.

HIGHLANDS IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY AND THE HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS LAND TRUST

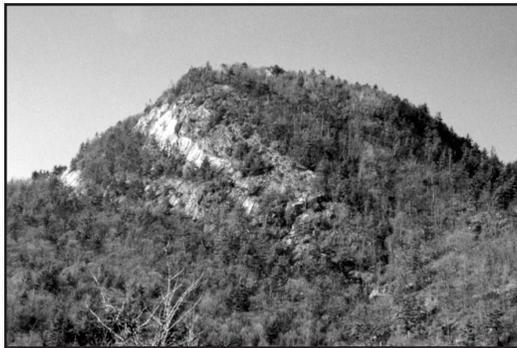
The Town of Highlands has been served from its earliest days by an institution that evolved over the years while consistently maintaining a farsighted purpose. The Highlands Improvement Society, first known as The Highlands Improvement Association, was in existence at least as early as 1883, only eight years after the founding of the town. Its stated objective was “to protect, preserve, and promote the natural beauty of Highlands.”

By 1887 the name of the organization had been changed to the Highlands Advertising and Improvement Association, and it operated under this name until 1905. In that year the association was incorporated and given the name of The Highlands Improvement Society.

The first acquisition of land by the Society came four years later. The summit of Satulah Mountain had been enjoyed by town people and visitors since the origin of the town, and a carriage trail to the summit had been constructed in the 1890s. One story relates that plans were afoot in 1909 to convert the trail to a toll road. Another story says that construction of a hotel on the summit was planned. Whatever the cause, the Society reacted with purpose. It determined to buy the Satulah summit and preserve public access to this unique scenic property.

Subscription of funds for the purchase began at a meeting of the Society on September 1, 1909. The subscription list was headed:

We the undersigned, realizing the advantages to the inhabitants and summer visitors of Highlands of securing in perpetuity access to the Point on the Summit of Satulah Mtn., and whereas land comprising the Summit is now offered for sale, we desire to subscribe to the purchase of the same to be secured to the Highlands Improvement Society for the use of the public.



Over \$250 was subscribed at the meeting, and additional contributions bringing the total to \$500 were in hand by October 6.

On October 9, 1909, the Society bought thirty-two acres at the mountain summit and another twenty-eight acres below the southern cliffs. Title to the property was placed in a trust with seven trustees. The terms of the sale, written into the deed, required that the thirty-two acres at the summit be held “forever for the purpose of making and maintaining a public park.” The Society then improved the existing carriage trail and cleared paths to other areas of the mountain.

Seventy-six Highlanders and summer residents subscribed to this cause. The two largest donors were Margaretta Ravenel and Charles Albert Hill who contributed \$50 each, a handsome sum in those days. Other donations were as small as five cents. One donor is identified as “Candy sold by Ed Potts \$1.00.” Twenty of the contributing families have descendants with residences in the Highlands area today. Descendants of the original trustees include Lydia Macaulley, granddaughter of Alexander P. Anderson, Louis Potts and Doris Potts, grandchildren of William T. Potts, and Martha Lamb and Steve Pierson, grandchildren of Jeremiah Pierson, as well as others of a younger generation of these three families.

Professor Thomas Harbinson, principal of Highlands Academy, wrote about this acquisition with pride and passion:

The top of Satulah is OURS to keep forever. No money grubbing skinflint without any soul can ever acquire this top and then put up a toll gate to charge admission to what he the same as stole from

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President's Letter

Dear Fellow Member,

As we look back, 2008 has been a year of many satisfying accomplishment for the Highlands Historical Society. Our activities this year include:

- Continued improvement of our exceptionally comprehensive museum and archives, due in large part to the dedicated hard work of our archivist, Ran Shaffner, aided by Sue Potts, Carolyn Patton, Nathalie Sato, and Anne Sellers
- Opening of the Bug Hill Cottage as part of our historic campus
- Publication for the first time of an educational newsletter for our members and other supporters
- Completion of work on the Highlands Heritage Trail walking-tour brochure and the installation of identifying markers on historic sites featured in the brochure
- Ninth annual Walk in the Park, featuring prominent artists in Highlands history
- A very successful Tour of Historic Homes, focused on the Clemson Colony at Mirror Lake
- Our Christmas Showhouse, to be held December 6 and 7
- Making a significant reduction in the remaining mortgage balance taken out to allow preservation of the Prince House, Highlands' oldest private residence

These accomplishments would not have been possible without your support.

I should also report that income from membership dues and contributions is down this year. If you have not done so, we hope that you will renew your membership in the Society now. Annual family membership is still only \$50, and membership for an individual is only \$35. We also hope that you will be able to add a contribution to your annual dues, as many of you have done so generously in the past.

It has been a pleasure for me to serve as President of the Society for the past two years, and I greatly appreciate your support and guidance.

Walter Wingfield

RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

We hope you will do it now.

Family \$50 • Individual \$35 • Sustainer \$100
Business \$250 • Promoter \$500 • Preserver \$1,000
Protector \$2,500 • Highlander \$5,000

And we hope you will add a donation, as many of you have done so generously in the past.

Highlands Historical Society
Post Office Box 670

Highlands, NC 28741-0670

or online at www.highlandshistory.com

2008 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 6-7: Christmas Showhouse

THE HIGHLANDS HERITAGE TRAIL

The Highlands Historical Society has been working for the past two years on a project in partnership with the Highlands Chamber of Commerce to develop a historic Highlands walking tour. The Highlands Heritage Trail is coming to fruition this year as a result of these efforts.

Historical Society archivist, Ran Shaffner, has prepared a brochure which lists 51 historic structures and other sites in or near downtown Highlands that can be visited on the tour. The brochure identifies 28 sites on a short 3-block tour in the Main Street/Fourth Street area, and a longer 20-block walk that encompasses all 51 sites. A map illustrates the location of all 51 sites, and each site is color coded to identify those on the short walk and the additional sites on the longer walk.

Volunteers have been attaching identifying markers to or near each of the sites. These markers display a number that corresponds to a number for each site shown in the brochure. Installation of the markers is nearly complete, with only a few remaining to be attached. Response from property owners has been very cooperative and most often enthusiastic, and the Society appreciates their generosity and cooperation in allowing the placement of these markers.

The brochures are available without charge at the Historical Society Museum on North Fourth Street and at the Chamber of Commerce on Main Street.

CHRISTMAS SHOWHOUSE, DECEMBER 6 AND 7

Fresh pine and evergreen, holly, red berries, apples—all easily gathered from the surrounding landscape. These are some of the things that Highlanders used to decorate their homes in the early 20th century. “Christmas Past” comes alive each year when the Historical Society opens one of the town’s historic homes decorated for the holidays by a talented group of decorators.

Ideas for traditional and contemporary decorations will be on display again this year when merchants and decorators donate their talents to provide the exceptional presentation. Decorators include Antiques and More, Basketworks, Cospser Flowers, Cut N Patch Quilts, The Dry Sink, and Barbara Smith.

The featured home was constructed by Joe Webb for Leroy M. Brown, a lumberman from West Union, S.C. It is one of the larger Webb homes and



was described in the survey for the National Register of Historic Places as “one of the finest and best preserved of the Joe Webb houses.”

Constructed in 1930, the house is made of chestnut logs. During construction, two men worked on each log, one at each end, checking the fit, and then rolling the log out of position to shape it more precisely with hatchets. The rate of completion was two logs each day.

The Showhouse will be open on Saturday and Sunday, December 6-7 from 1:00 to 5:00 PM with transportation provided by shuttle from Bryson’s Store. Admission is \$15,

and tickets may be purchased in advance at Cyrano’s Bookshop or through the Historical Society’s web site at highlandshistory@nctv.com. Tickets will also be available on the day of the event when boarding the shuttle at Bryson’s.

TOUR OF HOMES

This year’s Tour of Historic Homes featured six houses in the “Clemson Colony” on Cullasaja Drive by the south shore of Mirror Lake. The colony was originally composed largely of summer retreats owned by professors of Clemson College.

Three of the houses were constructed by Joe Webb, including “Cabin Ben,” familiar to generations of Highlanders but never before opened to the public. This two-story home, built in 1932, has six bedrooms and furniture created by R. J. “Bob” Lewis and Louis Edwards. It has been owned by the same family for five generations and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Another Webb cabin was built in 1939 for George W. Strong. It has chestnut built-ins and the original pine, tongue-and-groove ceiling. The exterior of the

cottage displays a unique Webb-designed, slab-sided construction. The third was built in 1931 for William Lippincott, a chemistry professor at Clemson who served on the boards of the Highlands Museum and Biological Laboratory.

Three other interesting homes rounded out the tour. One is the Harcombe home with rare chestnut bark siding, one of the few examples remaining in Highlands today. Another was “Redpaw,” built around 1930. This cottage has the original wormy chestnut paneling throughout.

The final home on the tour, Twin Springs, has cedar shake siding and was built circa 1932 as a summer home for Edward Rogers.

The chairman of this year’s very successful event was Eric Nesmith. All funds raised by the tour go to the support of the Historic Village and Museum.



HIGHLANDS IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY From page 1

God. I mean just what I say. No man has a right or can acquire a right to charge a man a toll to visit the tops of God's mountains.

The Society also made many other contributions to the community. Maple trees were planted along Main and Fourth Streets. A clock was donated for the tower at the new school. Six benches were installed along Main Street, and these benches received considerable use over many years. A bell was donated for the post office to be rung every day when the mail was "up." Stenciled signs were provided to mark twenty-four miles of hiking trails in the area. When the Kelsey Trail to Whiteside Mountain had become overgrown, the Society contributed \$100 to the reopening and improvement of this trail. A twelve-foot circular fountain was installed in the center of the intersection of Fourth and Main Streets. And in 1929 a small park with a granite memorial to Samuel Kelsey was created at the intersection of Church and Fifth Streets.

Then, over the next few years, the activities of the Society slowed and the membership declined until 1934. In that year the Society merged with the Highlands Community Club, and the combined organization was given the name of Satulah Club. The first purpose of the merged organization as stated in its certificate of incorporation was, "To preserve the natural beauties of Highlands and its vicinity." The Satulah Club picked up the banner of preserving natural beauty and would carry it in this name for another fifty-one years until another merger occurred.

The Prioleau Ravenel family had generously donated land for use as a public park in 1914. This was the ten acres known today as Ravenel Park which includes Sunset Rock and Sunrise Rock. Like the Satulah summit, this land had also been placed in trust, and it was held in this state for the next seventy-one years. Then, in 1985, the two trusts, the Satulah trust and the Ravenel Park trust, joined in a single, unusual organization. While the trusts remained as separate legal entities, they became part of one association with one set of by-laws and one group of trustees that controlled both trusts. This association was given a name too long for a letterhead, The Satulah Summit-Highlands Improvement Society and Ravenel Park Association. Then, in 1987, this recently formed organization was incorporated with the name of Satulah Summit and Ravenel Park Association, Inc., and titles to both parks were placed in the new corporation.

Two years later in 1989, the name of the young asso-

ciation was changed to Highlands Land Trust, Inc., and the pace of its activities quickened. It began to acquire additional properties for the preservation of the natural environment. Noteworthy acquisitions include an additional eight acres at Satulah summit and then another five-acre tract at that site which was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Howard Jenkins. The Kelsey Trail Preserve was acquired, and the eight-acre Betty Lindsey tract, which protects a portion of the trail to the top of Little Bearpen Mountain. The Henry Wright Preserve, home to an old-growth forest with the world's largest living hemlock, was transferred from the Nature Conservancy to the land trust. The first conservation easement received by the trust was given by Lydia Macauley and Hugh Sargent in memory of their mother and father, Ralph Sargent, who had owned the property and served as president of the Highlands Biological Station. Ermee Dixon donated thirteen acres of unspoiled land in the Sagee Mountain area. Now called Dixon Park, this property contains many endangered species of mountain flora.

In 2003, leaders in the Cashiers community invited the Highlands Land Trust to provide land trust service to that area. The trust then expanded its activities to include the Cashiers Valley, and its name was changed to Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, Inc., as it is known today. Among acquisitions in the Cashiers area are the tops of Chimney Top Mountain and Rock Mountain, both owned by Will McKee. The top of Laurel Knob, owned by Dr. and Mrs. Tom German, is now protected in perpetuity and provides natural habitat for mountain flora and fauna. A portion of Lonesome Valley, which has been owned by the Jennings family for many generations, was placed in a conservation easement providing secure passage for wildlife and a safe flight path for birds from Cashiers to Panthertown.

The Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust continues the role established by its predecessor organization over one hundred years ago. It now holds title and easements to some 1,750 acres protecting the biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and historic and cultural heritage of the community. The coming year, 2009, celebrates the one hundredth anniversary of the first land acquisition.

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Please let us know at
highlandshistory@nctv.com.**